JOSHUA WILLIAMSON ★ TOM REILLY ★ JORDIE BELLAIRE

BLUKE

image

#01

ENERGON UNIVERSE

CONFIDENTIAL

ALIAS

DUKE

ADDITIONAL FIELD OPERATIVES

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"EVEN IN BOOTCAMP, IT WAS CLEAR YOU HAD THE RIGHT STUFF.

"TOP OF YOUR CLASS. EXCEEDED ALL EXPECTATIONS.

"A LEADER **ON** THE BATTLEFIELD.

"AND **OFF.**

"**COUNTLESS** SUCCESSFUL EXTRACTION AND RESCUE MISSIONS--WITH **ZERO** COLLATERAL DAMAGE.

DUKE

"FROM **DAY ONE,** IT'S BEEN CLEAR THAT YOU ARE...

"A MAN OF ACTION.

"YOU TURN DOWN EVERY PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY.

"SOME THINK YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A CAREER **GRUNT.**

"BUT **I** KNOW BETTER.

"YOU BELIEVE YOUR PLACE IS NOT IN A COMMAND ROOM, BUT IN THE **TRENCHES** WITH THE **TROOPS.**

"YOU ARE ONE OF THE **FINEST** ASSETS PRODUCED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."

BUT NONE OF THAT MEANS **JACK** NOW.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, CONRAD?

INSUBORDINATION. CARELESSNESS. YOU'RE BARELY IN UNIFORM...

FRANKLY, I EXPECTED THIS OF YOUR **BROTHER,** BUT NEVER YOU.

DUKE

REGARDLESS, WE WANT YOU BACK.

YOUR COUNTRY **NEEDS** YOU BACK.

HAWK

YOU JUST HAVE TO PASS THE PSYCH EVAL.

AND STOP ASKING QUESTIONS...

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, COLONEL HAWK.

I SAW WHAT I SAW.

HAWK

"YOU'RE TURNING INTO A WALKING AMERICAN NIGHTMARE!"

YOU WEREN'T THERE!

I'VE QUESTIONED MY SUPERIORS BEFORE. I'VE HAD MY BAD DAYS, TOO.

BUT YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN THE ANSWERS, SON.

I'LL BE CANDID WITH YOU, DUKE.

"WE ENCOUNTERED A HOSTILE JET THAT LOOKED LIKE ONE OF OURS. AND THEN...

"YOU SPOKE OF MY ACTIONS ON THE BATTLEFIELD, SIR. AND THAT'S WHERE I FIRST MET TYLER FROST.

"BUT HE KNEW HOW TO LEAVE IT BEHIND. HE HAD A FAMILY. A WIFE.

"A **BABY BOY.** BARELY A YEAR OLD.

CLIK

SH-UNK

"HE WAS ONLY GIVING ME A RIDE BACK TO BASE AS A FAVOR.

DUKE

BOM

"WHATEVER THAT THING WAS, IT SNUFFED OUT FROSTING'S LIFE LIKE HE WAS NOTHING.

"AND IT **ENJOYED IT.**"

EVERY NIGHT...I TRY TO SLEEP...

BUT WHENEVER I CLOSE MY EYES...I SEE...THAT *THING.*

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

WHAT ABOUT HIS FAMILY?

WE TOOK CARE OF THEM.

WITH *LIES.*

I WAS WRONG. YOU'RE NOT READY. TAKE SOME TIME OFF. GO ON VACATION. HAVE SOME FUN. DANCE WITH SOME WOMEN. GET YOUR HEAD RIGHT.

AND THEN COME BACK.

WHAT DID THE BLACK BOX SHOW? LET ME SEE THE FILES.

THEY'RE CLASSIFIED.

THEY'RE GARBAGE!

KRASH!

I HAVE FOLLOWED *EVERY* ORDER TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY, SIR.

AND RIGHT NOW, MY COUNTRY IS *LYING* TO ME.

I'M GETTING ANSWERS. I *WILL* KNOW WHAT THAT FLYING ROBOT IS, THEN I'M TAKING IT OUT.

SIX MONTHS LATER.

VRRR

UFO

MINDBENDER

I SAW ONE, TOO...

ON THE FREEWAY, THIS MASSIVE TRUCK JUST LIKE... ***STOOD UP.*** IT WAS INTENSE.

IT'S A SECRET SOCIETY IN THE ICE, MAN.

THEY ABDUCTED ME. TOOK ME UP TO THE SHIP...

AND THEN HE RIPPED HIS FACE OFF AND WAS ANOTHER DUDE UNDERNEATH!

THEY GOT LITTLE GREEN MEN PILOTING THEM INSIDE THE HEADS, I KNOW IT!

-SIGH-

THIS WAS A MISTAKE.

LEAVING SO SOON?

DR. ADELE BURKHART?

THE ONE AND ONLY.

THIS...IS NOT WHAT I WAS EXPECTING...

IT'S EASIER TO HIDE THE TRUTH AMONG THE RIDICULOUS.

C'MON. STEP INTO MY OFFICE.

CHA

FORGIVE THE MESS, I'VE FOUND IT IS BEST TO BE AS LOW-TECH AS POSSIBLE...

FOR YEARS I DEDICATED MY LIFE TO FINDING A NEW CLEAN ENERGY SOURCE.

I BELIEVED WE WOULD FIND IT IN THE STARS.

ALIENS?

WHEN THE UNIVERSE WAS CREATED WITH THE BIG BANG, ELEMENTS OF THAT EXPLOSION SCATTERED ACROSS ALL OF CREATION.

IT SENT ITS COSMIC SPACE DUST ALL OVER. AND SOME OF IT IS STILL HERE.

WE JUST NEED TO FIND IT AND UTILIZE IT. I WAS GETTING CLOSE...

BUT THEN I STARTED TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR PLANS FOR IT, AND THE PEOPLE I WORKED FOR DIDN'T LIKE THAT.

I KNOW THE FEELING.

AFTER I LEFT, THE ENTIRE PROJECT WAS SHUT DOWN. MY LIFE'S WORK WAS DESTROYED, AS IF IT NEVER EXISTED.

THIS WAS ALL I WAS ABLE TO SAVE.

IF ANYONE IS EVER ABLE TO CAPTURE THAT POWER AND USE IT FOR WAR...?

THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE ***DEVASTATING.***

THE CREATION OF NEW KINDS OF WEAPONS UNLIKE THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN.

I SAW A LOT IN THE SERVICE. I THOUGHT I HAD SEEN IT ***ALL.***

THEN I SAW A ***ROBOT*** IN THE SKY, AND EVERYONE SAID I WAS CRAZY. IT MADE ME QUESTION EVERYTHING.

I BELIEVE THIS IS THE NEW APPLE FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE, AND THERE IS A ***SNAKE*** HOPING SOMEONE TAKES A BITE OUT OF IT...

THIS IS WHY I REACHED OUT TO YOU.

AFTER HEARING YOUR STORY, I BELIEVED YOU HAVE STUMBLED ONTO A HIGH-TECH ARMS RACE. AND THE COMPANY ON THE EDGE OF THAT IS...

BUT YOU GAVE ME ***HOPE*** THAT I'M NOT AS CRAZY AS I THOUGHT.

"M.A.R.S. INDUSTRIES.

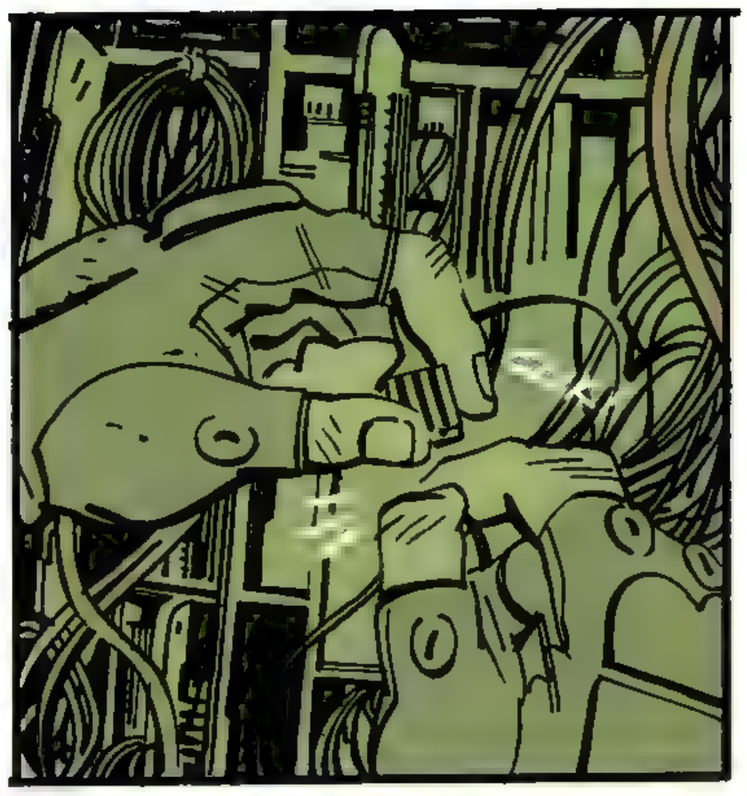
M.A.R.S.

"THE FAMILY WHO RUNS IT IS INCREDIBLY SECRETIVE. IT'S BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A LOOK AT WHAT GOES ON INSIDE."

MAYBE I'LL HAVE BETTER LUCK.

I'VE EXTRACTED PEOPLE FROM SOME OF THE MOST DANGEROUS WARZONES IN THE WORLD...

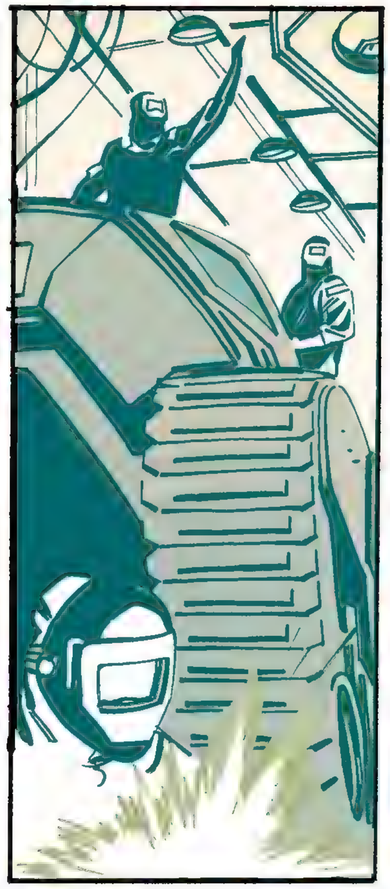
"...I CAN GET INTO SOME STUFFY CORPORATE OFFICE..."



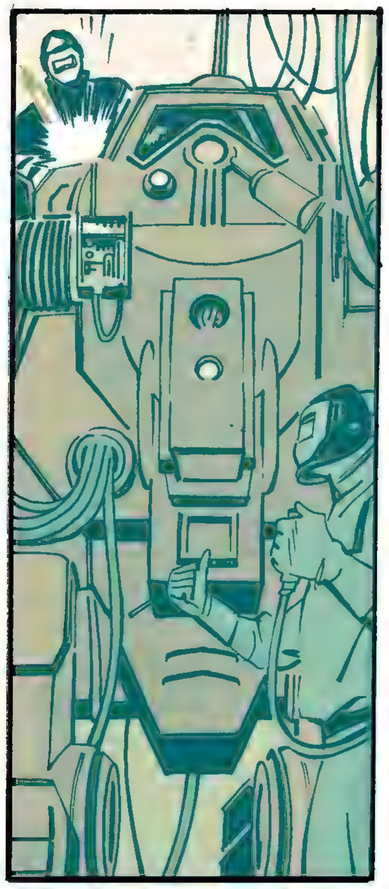
NNNNNNNNNNP!

ZZZT!

I'LL BE DAMNED...



WHAT ARE THEY...?



I KNEW IT.

YOU DON'T KNOW S#*%!

TAK

THUK

HEH.

TNK

TNK

WHFF

STAY DOWN, SOLDIER!

WHAT? HEY?!

GET OFF ME, YOU--

THUK!

YOU BUILT IT!

I KNEW IT!

NUT JOB!

WHUMP!

M.A.R.S.

YOU DUMB-- YOU'LL BE LUCKY IF THE ONLY THING WE DO IS CALL THE *COPS!*

GO AHEAD!

EASY, **MERCER.** JUST LET HIM GO.

HE'S SEEN TOO MUCH, BOSS.

LET ME KILL HIM **NOW.**

CALM DOWN.

IF MY FAMILY KILLED EVERYONE WHO POKED THEIR NOSE INTO OUR BUSINESS, WE WOULD HAVE GONE UNDER CENTURIES AGO.

WE ARE HARDLY THE ONLY PEOPLE KEEPING AN EYE ON HIM.

IF HE WERE TO DISAPPEAR OR **DIE**...IT WOULD DRAW TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO OUR OPERATION.

IT WOULD TURN US INTO THE TARGET.

THERE ARE OTHER WAYS TO DEAL WITH OUR CURIOUS FRIEND...

HEY, IT'S ME.

I SAW IT. PROOF.

A MAJOR MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX CAUGHT ME BREAKING INTO ITS HEADQUARTERS, AND THEY DIDN'T ARREST ME.

I NEVER IDENTIFIED MYSELF, SO THEY HAVE NO IDEA IF I'M A THIEF, A REPORTER, WHATEVER...

...AND THEY JUST LET ME WALK?

WHY?

THAT HAS TO SAY SOMETHING, MAN.

JUST CALL ME BACK WHEN YOU...

...GET THIS MESSAGE.

OH, NO.

I WANT TO BELIEVE
...CONRAD...?

...I WAS RIGHT...

DR. BURKHART?! WHAT HAPPENED?

WHO DID THIS?

A MAN... HE SAID HE WAS A BELIEVER... HE FLEW ALL THE WAY FROM AUSTRALIA...

...HE STOLE EVERYTHING... ALL MY RESEARCH...

BUT HE MISSED... THIS.

SAVE IT, DOC. WE NEED TO GET YOU TO A HOSPITAL. I'M CALLING--

WE'RE OUT OF TIME...

YOU CAN'T LET IT FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS...

FIND THE TRUTH...

FREEZE!

WHOA, BOYS. I'M UNARMED.

WE'RE ON THE SAME SIDE HERE.

JUST LET ME GET MY I.D.

HE'S GOT A GUN!

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG

BANG BANG BA
BANG BANG

STSH TSH TSH TSH TSH

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BA

POLIC

BANG BANG BANG BANG

TSH

BANG BANG BANG BANG

TSH TSH TSH TSH

WHAT THE HELL?

NO WAY HE SURVIVED THAT...

KSHHH!

"I THOUGHT DUKE WAS JUST TURNING INTO A LOOSE CANNON.

"BUT NOW HE HAS A *MISSION.*

"HE'LL NEVER STOP.

"NOTHING WILL GET IN HIS WAY..."

AND ONCE DUKE HAS MADE UP HIS MIND--

I JUST DIDN'T... YES, SIR.

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.

OF COURSE. I UNDERSTAND.

THIS IS MY MESS. I HOLD FULL RESPONSIBILITY. I'LL CLEAN IT UP.

ONE OF OUR OWN HAS BECOME A ***PROBLEM.***

DUKE HAS GONE ***ROGUE,*** KRIEGER.

CIVILIAN LIVES HAVE BEEN TAKEN, AND HE'S ON THE RUN.

DUKE IS ONE OF THE BEST, COLONEL HAWK, FINDING HIM WILL BE ***IMPOSSIBLE.***

NOT IF WE BRING IN THE ***BEST*** TO HUNT HIM DOWN.

IF WE WANT TO TRACK AN AMERICAN HERO...

"...WE GET AMERICAN HEROES!

"STALKER!

"ROCK 'N ROLL!"

NEXT ISSUE: MAN ON THE RUN!

DIRECT ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO
[redacted]
DUKE@SKYBOUND.COM

It started with VHS tapes and my dad.

G.I. JOE was a Saturday morning favorite, and my dad would tape the episodes so we could rewatch them over and over again until the theme song was burned into my mind. I find myself humming it all the time. I come from a military family, and that show was a place for those parts of my family to connect with me as a little kid.

I feel lucky to have grown up with a show that had a rich and diverse cast of characters and easily some of the coolest bad guys ever. It was fun and weird and didn't talk down to us kids that were glued to the TV set.

Then came the toys. All of my favorite characters came with the coolest weapons and gadgets. And the vehicles. The best of any toy line ever. My buddy and I would make deals with each other on who would get what toys so we'd never have duplicates, and we could have these massive Joe vs Cobra wars. I always played the Cobra side.

And that's what led to the best part of G.I. JOE. It wasn't watching the cartoons, it was creating new stories with my friends. Not just smashing toys together by myself, but creating our own adventures with our favorite characters.

And now I get to do that again with Skybound. It's been an amazing experience building the Energon Universe with Robert, Sean, Daniel, Tom, and Andrea. To craft a brand new shared universe that connects the G.I. JOE franchise with the TRANSFORMERS franchise from the start. I used to have notebooks full of story ideas for G.I. JOE, and now I can write them and play with all of these toys alongside creators that love these characters as much as I do.

Together we're building a new origin the G.I. Joe team and. taking a character as iconic as Duke and breaking him down into a raw state that we can mold into a version you've never seen before and show why Conrad should be the guy who leads the Joes. We want to show why he became synonymous with the franchise by how he reacts to this new world he's thrown into. This created the perfect opening for our story.

This will be the G.I. JOE that you know and love…but it will also not be. We can't just repeat what's come before. We took the pieces that we all love and shined a new modern light on them. We have the room to tell a multi-year story that will take these characters into new directions. It allows us to spend more time with the characters themselves and continue to show why this world has stood the test of time these past 40 years.

My hope is that you see that everything we're doing with Duke and the G.I. JOE world comes from a place of respect for what's come before. That you join us on a wild roller coaster ride that's familiar and yet still new and exciting. There are times we will shock and surprise you, but it's all within the spirit of what made us fall in love with this world to begin with.

As I write this, my own son plays on the ground of my office with some G.I. JOE toys. He loves to play with the Cobra toys the most. Like father, like son. Now I'm going to go watch some of the classic cartoons with him. It's not old VHS tapes, but that doesn't matter. It's just about us enjoying it together.

Hope you enjoy this first issue and COBRA COMMANDER #1 in a month.

Yo, Joe!

Joshua Williamson
November 2023
Portland, OR

UH, WHAT'LL BE, STRANGER?

I HAVE NEED OF A VEHICLE.

SSSPEAK NOW IF YOU CAN BE OF ASSSISTANCE.

HA! HOW THE HELL YOU GET ALL THE WAY OUT HERE WITHOUT A TRUCK, BUDDY?!

AND WHAT'S WITH THE LISP?

SMACK

DANG CIRCUS IS IN TOWN, AND NO ONE TOLD US, BOYS.

GOOD LUCK! IT'S COLD OUT THERE!

YOUR VEHICLE WILL DO NICELY.

NOW WHAT THE HECK IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

WHAT YA GOT THERE, WEIRDO?

THAT SOME KIND OF *TOY?*

NO MAN'S LAND

DRUNK?

ZZZRT-TRUK TK TK

AHHHH

NO MAN'S LAND

HEY, JIMMY, YOU FORGOT TO PAY, DAMMIT.

NO MAN'S LAND
REST STOP AND PUB

DRINK?

CAN'T BELIEVE HE'D JUST TAKE OFF LIKE THAT.

THAT SONOFA... HIS TRUCK IS GONE...

OH, JESUS...

WHAT...?

FFFF

THE COBRA THREAT BEGINS HERE

COBRA COMMANDER

Red-hot writer **JOSHUA WILLIAMSON** (*Superman, DUKE*) and **ANDREA MILANA** (*Impact Winter: Rook*) introduce the best, and worst, humanity has to offer. **COBRA COMMANDER** Enters the Energon Universe **JANUARY 2024**!

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EXPLORE THE

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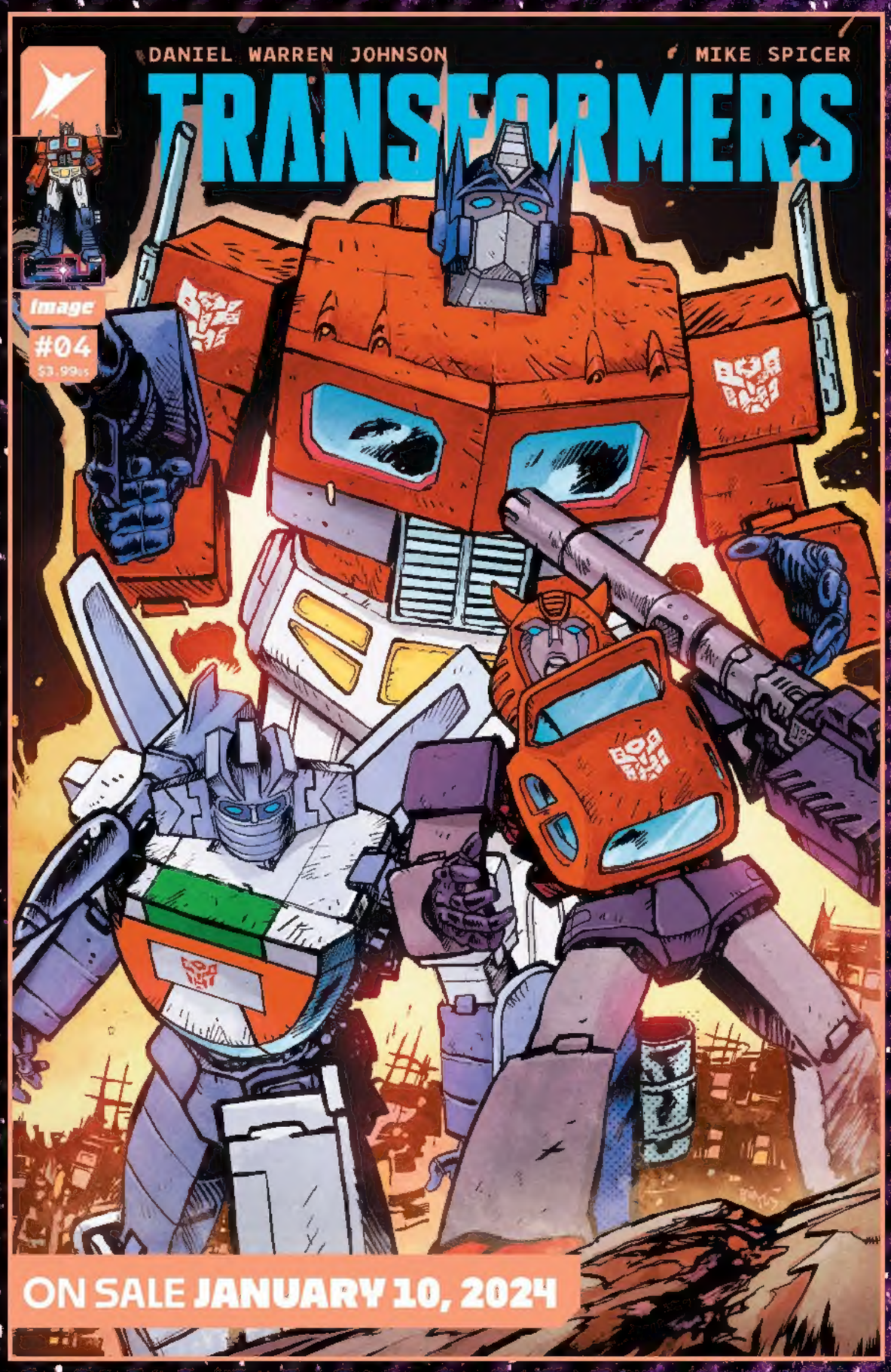

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